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The News & Observer

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Legislators look at changing funding system for schools

BY T. KEUNG HUI
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RALEIGH
State lawmakers could overhaul the way \$9.4 billion in public school dollars are spent annually, affecting the way that North Carolina's 1.6 million public school students are educated.

Legislators are looking at changing how the state funds

K-12 education after a highly critical legislative staff report that recommended overhauling the school funding system. Adam Levinson, chief financial officer at the state Department of Public Instruction, urged lawmakers to show caution before making any major changes, but some legislators say an overhaul is needed.

"Yes there are some improvements that are possible," Levinson said at Wednesday's meet-

ing of the Joint Legislative Task Force on Education Finance Reform. "There's relatively low-hanging fruit. "While overhaul is certainly an option, restoring, recalibrating, consolidating could all be considered to achieve your goals before the significant heavy lift of an overhaul." But Sen. Jerry Tillman, a Republican from Archdale, said it's up to the task force to do the hard work of coming up



Jerry Tillman

with a new school funding system. "If you're waiting for DPI to come up with a big and bold new plan for funding the schools, you will never see it," Tillman said. "They will do it in one of two ways: the State Board (of Education) will direct it if we direct the state board or we ourselves

propose a plan. Now in this committee is the very time to do something bold." It's uncertain what could result from any potential changes. Some Republican legislators have urged their fellow task force members not to come up with a system that shifts too much of the money to the larger urban districts. The GOP has more of its political strength in the state's rural areas and school districts compared with Democrats, who've fared better in the urban areas. Legislators such as Tillman have urged the group to recommend changes that would increase funding for charter schools, which are taxpayer-

SEE SCHOOLS, 7A

INTERNET FCC votes to repeal rules on net neutrality

BY JIM PUZZANGHERA
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON
Federal regulators voted Thursday to repeal Obama-era net neutrality rules for internet traffic - a major victory for telecommunications companies and another milestone for the Republican deregulation push under President Donald Trump. The 3-2 party-line vote by the Federal Communications Commission tears down the controversial utility-like oversight of internet service providers that was put in place by Democrats in 2015 to try to ensure the uninhibited flow of data online.

That strict regulatory structure will largely give way to market forces. Internet service providers now will be required only to disclose their online practices, with the Federal Trade Commission policing them for anti-competitive practices.

Republicans said they are simply restoring government oversight of the internet to where it was before 2015, re-establishing the light-touch regulatory approach that allowed the online ecosystem to flourish and develop into an economic force.

"The internet is the greatest free-market innovation in history," Ajit Pai, the Republican who took over as FCC chairman in January and pushed the repeal, said before the vote. "Entrepreneurs and innovators guided the internet far better than the heavy hand of government ever could have."

Pai's comments were interrupted when FCC security officers ordered the crowded meeting room cleared. The meeting was suspended for about 10 minutes while the room was swept after an apparent bomb threat.

Pai and other opponents of the net neutrality rules said they

SEE NET, 7A

Neuse River gets faster, wilder now that Milburnie Dam is gone



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Mark Lindblad shoots the Neuse River rapids Tuesday where the Milburnie Dam once was. The rapids are among Wake County's biggest.

BY JOSH SHAFFER
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RALEIGH
In the past 12 years, I've paddled the Neuse River at least two dozen times between Falls Dam and Clayton - a slow, muddy ride too mild to spill a drink. The humble Neuse never offered much in the way of thrills, short of a wild turkey flyover or a duck sighting.

The reason for this: Milburnie Dam - a 15-foot wall that turned the river into a bathtub, creating miles of pudding-thick backwater that flowed slower than a mud puddle.

Starting around Buffalo Road, anyone who paddled the Neuse slogged along by muscle-aching inches and endured a 100-yard portage through poison ivy.

But now the dam is knocked to rubble, releasing the Neuse from its long confinement, changing its nature and adding a new layer of fun. Where the dam once stood, boulders form a set of rapids that is among



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The Milburnie Dam, which was being removed in this Nov. 15 photo, created miles of slow-moving backwater on the Neuse River. The dam's demise likely will drain acres of rich wetlands.

the biggest whitewater in Wake County.

On Tuesday, I watched my friend navigate this new

SEE NEUSE, 7A

RALEIGH'S SLEEPY, OVERLOOKED RIVER COULD PLAY A MORE MEANINGFUL ROLE IN CITY LIFE. A FASTER, FRIENDLIER RIVER COULD ADD MORE FLOATING FUN-SEEKERS.

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